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CHINESE FOREIGN POLICY: FIVE AUTHORS IN SEARCH OF AN INTERPRETA--ETC(U)
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PREFACE

The growing interest in the foreign policy and national security strategies of the People's Republic of China (PRC) has been matched by a significant increase in the published literature on these topics. These writings, however, have been subject to only intermittent critical scrutiny, and usually as reviews of individual studies, rather than from the perspective of the overall field of Chinese foreign policy studies. In the hopes of bridging this gap, David Albright of *Problems of Communism* asked the author to assess a representative sample of recent works on Chinese foreign policy. In order of review, the books considered were:

Michael B. Yahuda, *China's Role in World Affairs*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1978.

Robert G. Sutter, *Chinese Foreign Policy after the Cultural Revolution, 1966-1977*, Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 1978.

King C. Chen, Ed., *China and the Three Worlds--A Foreign Policy Reader*, White Plains, New York, M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1979.

Wang Gungwu, *China and the World Since 1949*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1977.

Samuel S. Kim, *China, The United Nations, and World Order*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1979.

CHINESE FOREIGN POLICY:
FIVE AUTHORS IN SEARCH OF AN INTERPRETATION*

Jonathan D. Pollack
The Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, California
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During the past decade, the field of modern Chinese studies has experienced enormous growth in both the quantity and quality of scholarly effort. This intellectual expansion and maturation, however, has been far from uniform. If the books reviewed in this essay are an accurate indication of the state of knowledge in at least one area, then a profound gap exists between the analysis of Chinese foreign policy and numerous associated fields of research.

With one conspicuous exception, these five volumes provide abundant testimony not so much to a field losing its way, but to its never having had a road map in the first place. While much information and intermittent insight can be gained from several of these studies, their cumulative weight and contribution is not particularly impressive.

What went wrong? A brief review essay is not the appropriate context for either diagnosing this malady in much detail or in prescribing a potential cure. Nevertheless, it is both ironic and disquieting that, at a time of China's increasing visibility and activity in both regional and global politics, the study of foreign policy in the People's Republic still seems in critical respects such a rudderless endeavor. Indeed, if a single ailment seems to afflict foreign policy studies, it is the disease of particularity. The richness and frequent drama of China's interactions with the outside world over the past century and a half is undeniable. Yet this fact cannot by itself account for the insularity and isolation which continues to afflict most (though not all) students of PRC foreign policy.

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A more plausible explanation derives from the sheer enormity of effort required to enter the China field. The time and energy involved in acquiring the requisite skills to conduct research on this topic leads many practitioners to adopt a protective attitude toward ideas, issues, and approaches. At the same time, international relations specialists, perhaps somewhat intimidated by not knowing China's language, history, or culture, assume a comparably detached attitude. As a consequence, many writings on PRC foreign policy are blissfully ignorant of the world beyond China. Similarly, studies of world politics which seek to include China within their purview demonstrate an unduly simplistic and often ill-informed sense of what can be learned from the Chinese case.

To be sure, one should not minimize the problems in straddling disciplines distinct in orientation, training, and professional outlook. Moreover, the disparate fields comprising the discipline (indiscipline seems a more appropriate label) of international relations hardly offer an abundance of compelling concepts and methods. Nor does the analysis of Chinese foreign policy readily lend itself to the abstract, somewhat disembodied description characteristic of much research on world politics.

An additional key factor has discouraged scholars from moving beyond their conventional methods of inquiry--the inherent frustrations of trying to penetrate the dynamics of Chinese behavior. Few areas of Chinese politics are deemed more sensitive by the PRC leadership than those dealing with foreign policy decisionmaking. As a result, the usual secretiveness of the Chinese political process is accentuated even more with respect to questions of particular interest to the international relations specialist. It is no surprise that practitioners in the field (and this reviewer is no exception) grow attached to certain styles of research. Why discard a particular approach if it can (at least on occasion) yield the insight which makes analysis worthwhile?

If an answer to this question seems necessary, then these books undoubtedly provide the reasons. Only Samuel Kim's study--clearly the solitary example of conceptual and methodological innovation--yields

sufficient benefit in terms of content and insight to justify the cost of the effort. In various ways, each of the other volumes either does not succeed in its stated objectives or (worse yet) prompts the "so what?" retort. While the books obviously vary in their scope and detail (Chen's study, for example, is a reader with an introductory essay, rather than a book), this overall judgment is hardly cause for satisfaction about the current state of knowledge.

The most disappointing of these volumes is Michael Yahuda's study, *China's Role in World Affairs*. As the first book tracing the course of Chinese foreign policy during Mao's entire post-1949 career, one quite possibly expects too much from this volume. Putting aside such expectations, however, the book suffers from the absence both of a consistent, coherent structure and a persuasive intellectual rationale. The author's principal argument (stated rather inelegantly on page 14) is that "China's international position suggests very much a picture of a country whose political system is perhaps one of the most autonomous in the world, and of a country which internationally is untrammelled by the kind of interdependencies and alliance systems which limit the freedom of maneuver of other major powers." According to Yahuda, the entire history of China's external conduct since 1949 (for which Mao is given predominant credit) has been an effort to enhance China's capacity for independent action, both politically and militarily, all the while striving to guarantee the PRC its legitimate international standing both as a major power and as a nation with special links to the socialist states, revolutionary movements, the Third World, and the small or medium powers. These multiple concerns are revealed through what Yahuda terms China's international "role definitions"; that is, expressed Chinese views about the PRC's position in an endlessly shifting environment of both enemies and friends. "China's foreign policy," he suggests, "is best understood within China's own frame of reference" (p. 238).

Unfortunately, the findings yielded by such unabashed Sinocentrism are neither compelling nor consistent. At a purely descriptive level, Yahuda's effort is no doubt worthy of commendation, since he has pulled together disparate source materials (both official and unofficial) into a chronologically continuous account of the twists and turns of PRC

state policy. But what major new insights does his approach yield? The generalization that China has consistently sought to enhance its autonomy in world affairs not only seems unexceptional--what major state within the confines of its own resources does not?--but in critical respects mistaken. The PRC has no doubt sought to insulate itself from many of the great power political and military conflicts of the past several decades. And, more so than most nations, Beijing has succeeded in standing above or apart from the fray while still encouraging others to do China's bidding. Yet Chinese political and diplomatic involvements both regionally and globally are undeniable and growing; moreover, those charting China's international course have not infrequently found themselves either locked in armed conflict or at the brink of war. To deal with such dangerous circumstances, the PRC has all too often found it necessary to garner external support.

Yahuda, to be sure, would not deny that China is involved with an outside world; he would rather insist that PRC policy has never been mortgaged to the preferences of others. Yet his effort to demonstrate an unyielding Chinese commitment to this core principle ultimately assumes a rather forced quality. In central respects the book becomes less a chronicling of the conceptual basis of Chinese foreign policy strategy--a study which very much needs to be done--and more a discursive rendering of the extraordinary political and diplomatic gymnastics in which China's leaders have recurrently been compelled to engage.

The core problems with the book, moreover, are both analytical and methodological. For reasons which are never altogether clear, Yahuda deems it sufficient simply to describe certain key assumptions related to the structure of world politics at any given moment and how Chinese "fits" within the array of global political, economic, and military forces. These derive from various PRC declaratory policy statements, assessments of the international situation, and leadership speeches, both private and public. Yahuda relies to an exceptional degree on the manifest content of these materials, arguing that (in presumed contrast to other states) these expressed views have an immediate operational significance in the Chinese case. Openly and without apology, he has

committed the offense of literalism. Yet communications cannot be detached so mechanically from the political context in which they are conveyed. How a Chinese politician depicts the nature of the outside world has an undeniable impact not only on the theory and practice of PRC diplomacy and foreign policy strategy, but on the possible goals and programs pursued in a domestic context. Yahuda surely recognizes this obvious fact; indeed, intermittently he feels compelled to explore some of its consequences. But we are never told whether Chinese "role definitions" are an independent, dependent, or mediating variable. And, notwithstanding his intention to avoid discussions of Chinese behavior, he frequently puts aside the analysis of "China's role," focusing instead on various concrete political situations and episodes of elite conflict which have affected that role.

It is the author's recurrent insistence on China's uniqueness which ultimately proves most troubling. If Yahuda is to be believed, the PRC is simply unlike all other great powers. The same case, however, can be made for others, as well. Is France's political and military posture equivalent to that of the United Kingdom? And are the UK's a carbon copy of those of West Germany or Japan? Are there no conspicuous differences between Soviet and American global behavior? And (to cite the more appropriate example) what comparisons can be drawn between India and China? Taken to a logical conclusion, cannot all nations make a legitimate claim to uniqueness?

Yahuda declines to ask this last question. Instead, he contends that "the Chinese people have developed a unique political system which is self-generating and which is deliberately kept apart from penetration from outside factors" (p. 275). In addition, he asserts that the "three worlds" doctrine will serve as a "grand strategy" by which China will continue to "set itself apart from the interdependencies of others" (p. 284). Conclusive verdicts on these and related questions surely seem premature. However, by casting his argument exclusively within what he acknowledges as a Chinese frame of reference, Yahuda loses the perspective and detachment for which scholars, unlike nations, can strive and occasionally achieve. In view of the very substantial

research effort involved in preparing this study, the book's shortcomings are all the more regrettable.

The scope of Robert Sutter's book is much narrower than Yahuda's, but it too must be faulted as a study which achieves considerably less than one might have hoped. Sutter's intention is to survey Chinese foreign policy with respect to key events and specific bilateral issues from the onset of the Cultural Revolution until the months following the death of Mao. Somehow, the history of this tumultuous and remarkable decade is reduced to one hundred sixty pages of rather antiseptic prose. Perhaps it is unfair to fault an author for not attempting more. Yet so much cries out to be done in this study. By being unduly restrictive in both approach and objective, Sutter misses the opportunity to explore the complicated and fascinating foreign policy issues that have preoccupied Chinese decisionmakers since the mid-1960s.

Indeed, in critical respects this is not so much a book-length work, but a compilation of largely unedited intelligence materials. The monitoring and interpretation of Chinese state behavior is a very necessary task in the context of day-to-day intelligence analysis. However, the value of issuing these studies (some more than a decade old) in book form can be seriously questioned. By merely describing Chinese statements and actions with no effort to place them in a meaningful policy context, the result often seems more confusing than clarifying. Thematically, analytically, and chronologically, Sutter fails to capture the intricacies of the Chinese political process which so centrally affected the formulation and exercise of foreign policy during this period. His entire focus is on the output of the decision process, with virtually no attention to (or even sustained speculation about) how and why such decisions might have been made. It is a disappointing book which could have significantly enhanced our understanding of the complex politics submerged in the facade of unitary state behavior.

Chen's volume is intended to fill a niche in courses in PRC foreign policy, and at that level it probably succeeds. By compiling primary source materials (predominantly PRC official statements and editorials)

on various key foreign policy themes, he has provided a reasonable introduction to both the style and substance of Chinese documentation. Far less clear is how these various documents "fit" in any scheme of PRC behavior or policy objectives. A long introductory essay should have provided such clarification; instead, it hop-scotches across the historical record of three decades of Chinese foreign policy, and to no apparent end. Chen exhibits little or no sensitivity to differences within the Chinese elite over foreign policy strategy, even when some of his documentation makes reference to these differences; to the obvious tensions between a "pure" conception of the "three worlds" doctrine as opposed to the practical use given this idea in Chinese diplomacy and strategy; and to the major shifts over time in the emphasis and operational significance attributed to various official policy formulations. His inattention to these and related issues diminishes the worth of what is otherwise a necessary and welcome compilation of documents. The value of contemporary political history is in illuminating how and why ideas and issues have assumed significance for a given set of leaders; unfortunately, this quality is conspicuously absent from this volume.

Wang Gungwu's study is intended to demonstrate the continuing relevance of a broader historical approach to understanding Chinese perspectives on contemporary international relations. The belief that various historical associations serve as an enduring and even pivotal "filter" for elite values is a sensible and necessary idea. Toward this end, Gungwu argues that China's foreign relations since 1949 are best understood within the context of three recurring themes: "the desire to assert independence, the problems of modernity, and the determination to make revolution" (p. 1).

For two chapters, Gungwu elucidates these themes with considerable clarity. Unfortunately, these two chapters bring the reader only up to 1949, at which point the author then offers a conventional historical narrative of events, rather than the interpretive essay which he had earlier promised. Not only that, he immediately puts aside his chosen framework, and asserts that other issues took precedence.

For example, in the immediate post-liberation period, China's sovereignty and security were purportedly "more urgent and vital" than the goals of revolution; thus "in terms of independence, modernisation, and revolution, China's achievements by 1953 were modest" (pp. 43, 45). Putting aside the very considerable PRC aid proffered to both Korean and Vietnamese communists during these years, this suggests a rather severe limitation (or omission) in his framework. Unfortunately, it is an analytical problem which he never addresses. Equally troublesome, Gungwu deems it sufficient simply to note how one or another historical episode illustrates the validity of his three key themes. When events depart from these premises, he suggests without much elaboration that the Chinese were merely revealing their concerns about this issue in altered form. For example, Gungwu asserts that during the Cultural Revolution "the deep [Chinese] desire to be independent and to grow independently...took a very aggressive form in China's international relations" (p. 116). Putting aside whether China's external behavior during this period was in fact aggressive, why should events yet again depart from a revolutionary course whose "driving spirit is wholly rational" (p. 141)? For these and other questions, Gungwu has no answers. The study which demonstrates systematically where, when, and how China's past serves its present remains unwritten.

Fortunately, in *China, the United Nations, and World Order*, Samuel Kim demonstrates most impressively what can be achieved by thoughtful, creative inquiry. It is a meticulously researched volume, whose length and detail alone may regrettably deny it the attention it richly deserves. Indeed, the idea of a study on Chinese behavior in various international organizations providing singular insights into both the style and the substance of PRC foreign policy is not widely held. Yet Kim has very much succeeded, first by asking the right questions and then by knowing how to investigate them. The conventional lament about the absence of sufficient data preventing serious work on Chinese foreign policy is considerably less compelling in light of Kim's findings. By studying Chinese *behavior*, he has shown that much can be learned from evidence removed either from the decisionmaking process or conventional documentary analysis. Without question, this

is among the most important works yet published on Chinese foreign policy. Moreover, it clearly merits the attention of international relations specialists as a whole.

While it is not easy to reduce a very long and complicated book to a single proposition, Kim's study has a consistent, recurring theme: what is the relationship between expressed Chinese values about world politics and China's actual diplomatic practice? To investigate this issue, Kim undertook an exhaustive study of PRC behavior in the United Nations (including various conferences and participation in specialized agencies) from the time of Beijing's initial entry into the world body in October 1971 until August 1977. His approach is decidedly empirical: What did those acting in the name of China do, say, and seek to accomplish in various international forums? How does this behavior accord with expressed or implicit Chinese values? How does it compare with the behavior of other nations? What inferences can be made about the relationship of the PRC's global policy to emergent Chinese conceptions of a future world order?

Kim concludes that there is a discernible, relatively consistent orientation in Chinese diplomatic practice, and that this perspective represents more than expedient lip service to current international fashion. By lending support to the efforts of various less developed states to enhance national sovereignty, control natural resources, and pursue the development of a new international economic order--all under the general rubric of "opposing the hegemonism of the superpowers"--the PRC has staked its claim as an articulator of third world concerns. This support, however, has always been restrained and undemonstrative--a curious mixture of what Kim terms "symbolic activism and substantive passivism" (p. 493). As Kim observes, "China's support for the Third World is generally that of a partisan spectator who cheers, moralizes, and votes, when necessary, rather than an active, not to say leading, player in the game of global politics" (p. 262). Such "low-keyed and self-effacing behavior has enhanced both [China's] political legitimacy and [the UN's] political stability at one and the same time" (p. 199). Nevertheless, Kim also notes that the

Chinese have demonstrated an impressive ability "to disguise their interest in terms of principles" (p. 264). By pursuing these interests with conscious understatement, the PRC has succeeded as "a major power commanding respect and influence without really trying" (p. 161).

The cumulative impact of Chinese participation in the UN therefore has been one of "mutual legitimization" for both the People's Republic and the world body. Over a period of time, Beijing's representatives have learned a considerable amount about the prevailing norms of international law and organization, and how China can best function within them. At the same time, the PRC has deliberately if unobtrusively cultivated a principled image in pursuit of its long-term strategy of world order. As Kim concludes, "the Chinese strength lies in symbolic capability--ideological, political, and behavioral. Chinese multilateral diplomacy has concentrated more on the making of new rules, new norms, and new structures...than on commanding the capabilities that would assure implementation of a new order" (p. 492).

In the past three years, however, the PRC has departed in significant ways from the value-oriented approach favored by Mao and described at length by Kim, adopting instead a more power-oriented view. Chinese references to the "three worlds" theory have become far less frequent and at times almost perfunctory. Various international involvements unthinkable in the era of Mao Zedong have now come to the fore, thereby undermining the presumed immutable Chinese commitment to at least some of the values which Kim identifies. To this extent, the author can be faulted (along with all other China specialists) for overstating the extent to which past "principled commitments" would stand in the way of present imperatives and opportunities.

Putting aside this shortcoming, however, Kim's book is a pioneering effort. Unlike so many others, he did not succumb to the temptation to treat China in isolation. The lasting value of his study is that it places the PRC within an existing legal and institutional context, to which China, like every other international actor, must adapt, if not conform. Whatever one's view of the value of studies of world order or international organization, Kim's work would have been rendered

largely meaningless in the absence of his obvious command of these fields. China's emergence as a world power is no less of a fascinating issue from either of these alternative frames of reference. For specialist and generalist alike, Kim has shown what can and must be done to link China to the larger field of international studies. If these five studies offer a reasonable estimation of the current "state of the art", then this effort has only just begun.

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